

## **Pressure by OTTSTF**

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**Summary:**

El's powers are amazing, sure. But nosebleeds can't be a good sign, right?

What if she's hurting herself? Like, *really* hurting herself?

Everyone's been thinking it, but nobody's wanted to worry her. Karen, on the other hand, as any protective mother would, lets the worry break out.

## Pressure

### Author's Note:

This started out as a note document of probably less than one hundred words. How it ended up at 4,840 words... I'll never know.

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Takes place after [Motherly Trust](#). You don't need to have read that before this, though.

Visits to the Wheeler residence became quite common shortly after revealing the truth to Karen and Ted. If El and Mike had their own way, she would've moved in by now. But, that not being the best idea for multiple reasons, they settle for the best: frequent visits; typically spending most of the day.

The Wheeler residence is quickly becoming El's second home, really. Anyone can see that. And, contrary to what most may believe, Hopper's actually quite relieved by it. No longer does she need to be on her own ever again. She now has two extra homes she can retreat to: The Byers' has always been open to her, and now the Wheelers'.

Having opened the truth to the Wheelers' had made life a lot easier for everyone, Hopper must admit. He's always known that, once El became capable of leaving the cabin again, she'd be spending a *lot* of time with Michael. He's not stupid, he get's it. These two have a connection that most adults long for, so El practically living with the Wheelers was an obvious thign to expect.

Hopper still worries about these two, although he tries his hardest to hide it. He knows *those* assholes came looking for her here. This was their first search location when trying to find El after the school fiasco.

Karen had worried about that, too. She informed Hopper of the wiretapping they seemed to perform on practically every object in the house, quoting "she can't contact you without us knowing."

It was then that El had suggested she could find said objects. So with that, Hopper retrieved the wire that had been placed in his trailer, allowing El to use that as a reference as she searched the house in her mind.

This was the first time Karen had noticed something *very* worrying about El and her powers:

The nosebleeds.

El's using her brain in magnificent ways, and it's causing blood to fall from her nose?

No matter how much El insists it's just a tingle, that she's not in any pain, Karen knows, that absolutely cannot mean anything good.

And so that's why, as she watches Holly laugh and giggle atop a floating chair, whilst she can't help but smile at Holly's excitement, she finds herself looking at El in the corner of her eye – feeling her gut wrench as she observes the trickle of blood begin to emerge from El's nose.

She can't just sit here and let El go on doing this, she thinks to herself. She'll let this moment happen; seeing the happiness in all of her children's faces (Holly, Mike, and El – she'd started calling El 'her girl' quite soon after their initial meeting) makes her reason that *this* moment should be allowed to happen. She'll have the conversation with El later.

Later isn't too far away, as Mike insists she stop for a moment so that she doesn't strain herself too far. This oddly gives Karen a hint of reassurance: perhaps Michael has been worrying about the same thing. He's a very smart boy, after all.

So, as they're tidying up the dining table after lunch (Karen saying she's got it, El insisting she helps as a thanks, Mike following her lead

because *he can't possibly let El do that herself* ), Karen breaks the silence to bring up the subject in the most subtle way possible (she hopes).

“El?”

El hums, rising in pitch as her response, as she dries a plate.

“When you’re using your powers, does it hurt at all?”

“Not really.” she responds, seemingly thinking nothing of it. “More of a tingle, really. Unless it’s something really hard. Like, after closing the gate. Dad called that a migrane.”

Karen clenches her eyes closed as she contains her cringe at the thought of El straining every last fibre of herself to push whatever that demon was away.

She sets her cringe aside, moving further into the subject she’s concerned about.

“Do you know why you bleed?”

El’s eyebrows furrow in slight confusion at the question.

“No, not really.” she admits. “Why?”

“Well, it’s worrying me.” Karen admits.

“You’re using your brain, in extraordinary ways, and it’s causing you to bleed. It’s scary, El, I’ll be honest.”

Mike ducks his head with his eyes closed, silently nodding slightly.

“I don’t want to scare you, El, but I think you could be doing some real damage to yourself. I’m worried that if you keep pushing yourself too much, you could end up hurting yourself too much to the point of no return.”

“No return?” she questions, glancing between her and Mike (Mike being the one that usually explains things to her).

Mike’s about to begin talking, when El cuts him off.

“Like my mama?”

Mike's head drops, whilst Karen just silently sighs. She knows of Terry's story, and she feels so much for this girl.

"I... didn't want to say that." Mike tells her. "But... I don't know. If you are damaging your brain, and you do it enough, you could end up like her I guess."

El's eyes are full of worry. Tears begin to fill in them, which puts Mike into overdrive.

"You don't need to worry, El! You've not done anything yet! -"

But El storms off, leaving them with "I'm sorry.".

"El!" Mike calls after her, following directly behind. Karen stands there, feeling tears of her own well up. She knew that El's reaction wouldn't be great, but she *knows* that she had to get this out. It's all for El's safety.

She hears Mike plea El to let him in, having stormed upstairs into what she believes was Mike's room.

"El, please. You've not done any damage yet, okay? You're still absolutely fine, we're just worried for you."

"Go away Mike, please."

"El, I'm sorry. I'll stay quiet if you need time, but I'm staying right here, okay? You know I hate seeing you upset, El, so please, when you're ready, let me in. I just... wanna talk."

She doesn't respond. Karen can't help but feel pride towards her son; so caring, so real to the world. Where he got it from, she has no idea.

She can't help but worry about El right now though; hearing that she wants *Michael* to leave her... things are bad.

So she calls Hopper.

“Hop, it’s Karen.”

“Karen? What’s up? Is everything okay?”

“Nothing serious, I just think you should come down here and talk to El. She’s upset, it’s my fault. Michael’s trying to get to her, but she’s locked herself in his room and we’re worried sick.”

“I’m on my way.” and with that, he’s dropped the phone onto the hook and is walking towards the door faster than he could blink.

It doesn’t take long for the doorbell to ring. Karen answers it, Hopper immediately questioning the cause of El’s upset.

“What’s happened?”

“I’ve... just been a bit worried about her, chief. She uses her powers a lot, and it’s usually alright, just some little things here and there. But earlier, she was giving Holly a ride on the La-Z-Boy, making it fly like a fairground ride. She was having fun whilst she was doing it of course, but it was obviously hard, because it got her nose bleeding. I didn’t say anything at the time, but while we were doing the dishes, I brought it up, and... I said too much, Hop. I’m worried she’s causing damage, I said too much, and now she’s scared she’ll end up like her mother.”

“... Jesus.” Hopper sighs.

“I’ve been worrying about the same thing, Karen.” he tells her. “We’ve been in two places over it. I’ve been trying to get her to tone it down, but she’s just wanted to keep training herself, saying that the more she works on it, the easier stuff gets and the less she does bleed.”

“I don’t know what to do, Hop.”

It’s then they hear the telltale sound of Mike’s bedroom door opening.

“I think your son’s managed.” Hopper says.

“I knew he would eventually.” she says, relieved.

“El, hey.” Mike says as he walks through the door – El having opened it with her powers despite the situation. He walks over to where she’s curled up in his bed. He sits beside her, placing a hand on her shoulder gently. He expects her to knock him away, but instead, she slowly turns to look at him, and the look on her face breaks his heart. Eyes red from tears, absolute upset and fear mixed together.

“El, you’ll be okay.” he tries to reassure her. “You haven’t done any damage yet, I promsie.”

“How do you know that, Mike? P-B-Brenner had me straining myself every single day. I’d bleed from my nose, my ears too. He never cared.”

“He was an asshole.” Mike tells her. “But hey, you’re okay, right? You’re here right now, and you’re absolutely fine.”

“But what if that’s why I’m so stupid?” she says, continuing before Mike has the chance to say anything. “I didn’t even know what a friend was, Mike. I couldn’t tell the time, I could barely speak. I still have trouble now and then. What if this is why?”

“No El. You know that’s not why. You’re *not* stupid, you never have been and you never will be. Brenner didn’t let you learn this stuff, El. All you knew was what he wanted you to know. That’s not your fault, El.”

She sighs, nodding her head, curling into him as she does. He holds her tight, letting her cry against his chest. He hears the creaks of the floorboard outside his door, and so he takes a quick peak towards it. He sees his mother and Hopper standing there, silently observing him and El. Hopper gives him a thankful smile, nodding his head once as a *hello*. Mike returns the gesture, before landing his head atop El’s as he keeps her held in his arms.

“It’s like...” she sniffles. “Me telling you that you can’t use your hands, or it’ll kill you.” she tells Mike and the two adults. “It’s just...

normal, for me. I can't just... stop.”

“I know, El.” Mike sympathises. “But you don’t bleed for simple things any more... maybe you’ll still be able to do small things, but not anything too hard.”

She nods her head. “I hope so.”

It’s then that Hopper decides that he wants to have this entire situation checked. He knows El won’t be exactly enthusiastic to revisit a lab to have her brain examined by probes stuck to her head, but this is important. The knowledge of *whether* El’s powers are causing any damage or not will be good knowledge either way for all of them; if they’re not (which, of course, he hopes), then he can stop pressuring her to not use them. She can train herself to her heart’s content. If things aren’t good, and she has been harming herself, then she’ll have a reason to listen to him when he worries so much.

So it’s with that, that he goes to call Doctor Owens.

“Doctor Owens speaking. How can I help?”

“Hey Doc, it’s Jim.”

“Hey, Pops! How’s things?”

“Listen, we’ve had a bit of a... worry, over *her*. Nothing in relation to *you know who*.”

“Right, so what you’re saying is that you’d like to meet up.”

“Yup.”

“Time and place?”

“My trailer, around 12. Tomorrow preferably.”

“Good lord, talk about short notice. Alright, I should make it.”

“See you then, Doc.”

“Ay’aye, Jimmy boy.”

*Short and sweet.*

*Now to encourage El.*

*No. Not me. Michael will get better results. (Of course he will).*

“Hey Wheeler.”

“Hey Hopper.” he comes back with quickly.

“I need the help of El’s favourite person.” the man tells him.

He smiles immediately at the title, his head ducking slightly in a small blush.

“What can said person do for you?”

“I just spoke to Doc. Owens. We’re gonna meet tomorrow; I basically want his input on our little fear about El and her powers.”

“Right...”

“I need you to encourage her to come with me. For all I know, if I mention it, she’ll jump to conclusions and assume I mean tests, which, let’s be honest, would probably be beneficial right now. I need you to encourage her into coming with me, even if Owens does end up wanting to run tests.”

“On two conditions.” Mike demands.

“What’ll those be?”

“One: I come with you.”

“Knew that was coming.”

“And two: If he *does* run tests, I want it done privately. None of his co-workers, *nobody* but us and him.”

“That’s the most obvious thing you’ve ever said.”

“Good. Then I’ll try.”

The man pats Mike on his shoulder. “Thanks, kid.”

“No.” El immediately responds to Mike as he tells her of Hopper’s plan. She looks visibly panicked, as if she’s worried it’ll land her back in the hands of Brenner. *Can’t blame her for that, really.*

“El, please. This is for your benefit, really. All we’re doing tomorrow is talking to him. If he wants to run tests, it’ll be *just* him, okay?”

“Mike, I don’t want to.”

“I know, El. I get it. But finding out whether your powers *are* hurting you or not will put us all at ease. If they’re not, then we never have to worry again. If they are, then we can see to what extent you can still use them.”

“Mike, I...” she sighs.

“You’ll be there?”

“Through the whole thing, El. I promise.”

“And I can leave if I want to?”

“Yes.”

She sighs again, visibly uncomfortable with the idea, but considering it.

“Fine.” she says. “I’ll go.”

Mike sighs in relief. “Thank you, El.” He hugs her. “It’ll be okay, I promise.”

The next morning, Mike is picked up by Hopper and El at 11:30. They set off towards Jim's old trailer without hesitation. He's not told El or Mike, but he's packed an extra rifle in the boot, *just in case* any uninvited guests decide to show up.

Mike works his magic, comforting El as they make their way, right up until Owens knocks the door, at twelve on the dot.

"Have you been waiting by this door just to knock at the perfect time?" Jim questions as he lets the man in.

"No, just *that* accurate." he claims.

"Right, if you say so. This way." he leads Owens to the small dining table that currently houses El and Mike, with two empty chairs intended for himself and the doctor.

"Hey Mike; Jane." Sam makes himself as he sees them.

"Hey, doc." Mike responds.

"Hello." El follows, sounding extremely nervous and uncomfortable.

"Hey, I'll get this out of the way now: I'm on your side." Sam says to her. "I'm nothing like the assholes you had to put up with, *I promise*. Whatever's gotten you guys worried, I'll do the best I can to help. If there's anything you want out of, you just tell me, okay? You are in control."

She nods, smiling slightly. She considers that this *is* the man who produced the birth certificate that has helped lead you to a normal life; so surely he can be trusted by this word.

"So what's got you all worked up, then?"

Mike takes that as his cue to speak.

"It's about her powers." he starts. "You know she gets nosebleeds,

sometimes from the ears as well if she strains herself too hard?"

"I'm aware."

"Well that's our worry. Basically, my mom brought it up, and said what we've all been thinking but haven't wanted to say in front of her. We're worried that she might be causing damage."

"I see..." Owens nods his head. "That's a logical assumption."

"What do you think, Doc?" Hopper insists.

"Well, I can't say anything for sure." Sam informs them. "There's two causes for bleeding that I can think of right now: one, your fears are real, and it's from possible brain damage,"

All faces react to him saying this.

"Or two, it's just a side-affect. Maybe an artery leaking due to some unusual activity. I hope I can tell you it's this one."

"So what're you suggesting?" Hopper asks.

"Well, there's no way for me to know unless we run some tests." Sam admits. "Now Jane, I know you're not going to like the sound of this, and I completely understand. But I promise you, *all* of the old staff at the lab? All the ones who were there before I came along, are gone. There memories have been wiped, and new staff have been brought in."

El's already visibly panicked. Mike notices her starting to shiver slightly, so he takes her hand without hesitation.

"Hey, El, it'll be okay, I promise."

"You're not even known to any of them, I can assure you. So if you agree to come in for some testing, I'll make sure that it stays that way. They won't know who you are, where you're from, or about your history. All they'll know is what you can do, and what we're looking for."

"Can you keep it to just us?" Mike asks the doctor. "We'd be a lot more comfortable if there's absolutely nobody else involved."

"I'd like that, believe me, but there's no way I can watch *everything* at

once. I'm sorry.”

Mike sighs, nodding his head. He turns to El.

“Listen, I know you’re scared. I know that place is the *last* place on Earth you want to go, but this is all for the good, okay? I’ve seen this guy a lot, from some of Will’s visits. He’s a good guy, I promise.”

Sam finds himself smiling; hearing Mike speak good of himself is heartwarming, but the way he speaks to Jane, or *El* as he’s calling him (nickname from *Eleven*, he figures) is actually kind of awe-inspiring. Not many kids his age have the wisdom he does.

“How many?” El asks Sam.

“How many others?” he asks. She nods her head.

“Only as many as I need. One for brain waves, one for X-rays, I’ll be keeping an eye on as much as I can. So I imagine just two other people will be enough.”

She nods her head. “Good people?”

“The best, Jane. I promise. No word will get out of you ever being there; I swear.”

She nods her head again. “Okay.”

Mike sighs in relief, whilst Hopper ruffles her hair.

“Good kid, El. Thank you.” Hopper says.

“So, when can these tests be run?” he then asks Sam.

“We could go right now if you wanted; get it over and done with, so to speak.”

Hopper nods his head. “That good with you, El?”

She sighs, as if mentally preparing herself for the onslaught of memories this will bring.

“Yes.”

“Alright then. I’ll head there, prepare things, and figure out the two others I’ll bring in for assistance. Give me about an hour, then I’ll

meet you at the door. Good with you?”

“Perfect.” Hopper responds. “Thanks a lot, Sam.”

“Don’t mention it, Pops.” he says as he stands from his chair. “I’ll see you all then.”

“You shall. See you soon.”

Sam gives a quick salute to them as he walks back to his car. Hopper’s sure that this hour will be the most uncomfortable hour of his life. He lets El and Mike watch TV until they need to leave.

Before they know it, they’re walking into the room that houses two other men, a bunch of equipment, what seems to be a large weight, and a chair. El freezes on the spot as soon as the door opens. Must be very similar to what life used to be like for her, Hopper assumes. Mike springs into action immediately.

“Hey, El, don’t panic. I’m sorry if this is bringing back memories, but you’ll be alright.”

“Hey, kiddo.” Sam follows after Mike. “Remembr what I said, okay? If you want out, you just tell us, and we’ll stop what we’re doing immediately. I know it’s pointless me saying this, thanks to the place, but we want you to be as comfortable as can be during this, okay?”

“Doctor Owens has briefed us both already.” one of the men speak up. “We understand your uncomfor, but we can assure you, we’re as on your side as he is.”

“That’s right.” the other follows. “And as Sam just told you: You’re in control. You’re our boss right now, Jane. You want us to cut things short? You say. You want us to jump? We ask how high. You get my point.”

She nods, still feeling overly uncomfortable, but she slowly walks into the room.

*Then she spots the brainwave helmet* on the table, and she panics all over again.

“No!” she backs up.

“El, El what is it?” Mike holds her hand tight, following her.

“They’ll cut my hair!” she points to the helmet on the table. “That’s why they used to keep it short! So they could use that!”

Mike flicks his head over to where she points, and understands immediately.

“Jane, Jane!” Sam comes over to them.

“We’re not cutting your hair, I promise. You’ll just be wearing this.” he shows her a hair net. “Your hair will be inside this, out of the way. We’re not cutting it at all, I promise.”

She eyeballs the hair net, looking at it as if it could jump at her hair and eat it all off any second now.

“In fact, I don’t think there are any cutters in this entire building.”

She slowly eases, seeming to trust Sam’s word.

“Here,” he raises his hands towards her head. “Can I?”

She nods her head, and so he places the hair net onto her head, ensuring all hair is captured before lifting it up slowly, as far as it can get without any hair poking out.

“There, see? That’s it. The equipment will work fine, just like that.”

She nods her head, then allowing Mike to lead her back into the room.

“Alright, Jane, take your seat. I’ll set you up, and then we can take things at your pace. Simon will be watching brainwaves, and David will be snapshotting X-rays. I’ll be watching your heartrate. Mike and your father can stay by your side through the whole thing.”

She nods, sitting onto the chair. Sam picks the helmet from the table,

and El visibly shivers as she feels it land onto her head. Mike squeezes her hand, as if to keep her in the present and not allow her memories to take over. Sam feels his gut wrench as he wonders what kind of life she had with Brenner to be this scared towards the equipment.

With a heartrate monitor on her index finger, Sam steps back. Hopper stands closely behind, whilst Mike kneels by her side, keeping her hand firmly in his.

“Okay Jane, when you’re ready, I need you to lift this weight.” Sam informs her. “It’s heavy, since we want to cause bleeding here to find out where it’s coming from. As soon as David finds that, he’ll let you know so that you can let go. Is that okay?”

She nods her head, taking a breath before focusing on the weight in front of her.

The table its on groans from the small relief of weight, but it doesn’t go anywhere. *This really is heavy.* It’s then that El recalls Kali’s advice: anger. Easier than ever, El lets her mind play back memories of her childhood before escaping. Brenner forcing her to do this every single day, not caring about her comfort. Immediately the weight begins to levitate from the table, being held up as if it were a feather floating in the wind.

“Holy shit, this is amazing...” Simon whispers just loudly enough for everyone to hear. David repeatedly snaps X-ray images as El keeps the weight afloat; he can’t help but also be amazed at what he sees in the images. The X-ray imaging shows a sudden rush of blood away from the brain, which coincides with the increased heartrate beeps. Then the imagery shows the path of the nosebleed; he has what they’re looking for.

“Got it! You can put it down.” he calls to El. She gently lowers the weight back onto the table, it groaning as she does. She leans forward as she stops holding the weight, lifting a hand to her head as she closes her eyes in response to the headache she now has. Mike jumps up to hold her.

“You okay, El?”

She nods, lifting her head slowly.  
“Headache.”

“What’s the diagnosis, boys?” Sam insists.

“I’ll get it out of the way:” David says. “You’re *not* doing any damage.”

Sighs of relief fill the room from El, Mike, Hopper and Sam.

“The only activity I can see is a sudden rush of blood *away* from the brain as soon as you start straining, which explains the light-headedness. And then-” he points on one of the images. “Here. The sudden rise in blood pressure causes a standard nose bleed. Nothing to worry about. I *would* worry about the apparent bleeding from the ears you’ve told us about, though, as that must be a case of arteries bursting, which is never a good thing.”

“Okay.” Mike speaks. “So what you’re saying is, she doesn’t have to stop using her powers? The nosebleeds aren’t anything to worry about, as long as she doesn’t start leaking from her ears too, she’s completely safe?”

“Well, I mean, unless she keeps going long enough to lose a significant amount of blood, yes, that’s what I’m saying.”

“Thank god.” Mike sighs.

“Thank you so much, guys.” Hopper follows. “I owe you, Owens.”

“Not at all, Pops; it was our pleasure. The discovery’s put us at ease, too.”

“Absolutely.” David agrees.

“Right behind you.” Simon follows. “Jane, I’m really sorry if this reminds you of your past, but as a man of science, I can’t *not* say this: You are absolutely amazing.”

That finally puts a smile on her face. “Thank you.” she responds, rising from the chair. “And thank you all, for the help.”

“It was our pleasure, Jane.” Sam tells her. The man then turns to Hopper. “Listen, if you ever need my help again, don’t hesitate to call, alright? We’ve got *actual* doctors here, nurses too. Whatever your need, come see us. You’ll be kept top-secret by us all, Jane. No word will ever get out. We swear that to you.”

“Thanks, Doc.” Sam responds.

“Well, it’s been our pleasure. God, that’s getting repetitive. Anyway, come on, I’ll lead you out.”

And with that, they’re shortly back in the truck, heading out the gates.

“I assume you want me to drop you off with him.” Hopper asks El, without budging a muscle.

“Please.” she responds, smile growing on her face.

“Oh, come on. We all know full well that ‘*please*’ was more a ‘*you better, or I’ll break your fingers right now.*’”.

Mike and El both laugh at that.

In what seems like a blink of the eye, they’re home. Hopper doesn’t wait around; just letting the two out before setting back off again. Karen must have heard the engine of Hopper’s truck, as she flings the door open whilst they’re only half way up the path.

The closes the door behind them in a hurry, not hesitating to ask of the day’s news.

“Well? Are we in the clear? Please, please tell me it’s good news.”

“It’s good news, mom.” Mike says. The woman sighs in relief, pulling El into a hug.

“Thank god for that.” she looks up to the ceiling as she speaks, relief written all over her face.

“It’s just blood pressure.” Mike informs her. “Blood rushing away from the brain; if the pressure rises too much, it causes a standard old nosebleed.”

“Oh that’s great to hear.” Karen responds. “And I’m sure Holly will be relieved, too.”

El smirks at that. As if on-cue, Holly’s voice rings through the house.

“Ellie!” she runs into El’s open arms.

“Hey, Holly!” she greets as she lifts the girl up, spinning her around as she giggles.

“Well?” Holly quickly asks. “Can you still give me rides?”

El laughs, looking to Mike as she hears him laugh slightly as well. Mike smiles at her, happiness beaming from him as he waits for the response he knows she’ll give.

El then looks back to Holly, all expecting and curiously impatient.  
“All aboard.”

In a blink of an eye, Holly’s cheered her way to the La-Z-Boy, nearly knocking it over as she dives on. El and Mike take their seats on the sofa, flicking the TV on, and then El lifts Holly’s chair off the ground, beginning to spin it as she had been yesterday. They can barely hear the TV over Holly’s cheers of excitement, but that doesn’t matter.

The sole fact they can still hear these cheers from Holly, for this reason, is all they could ever want.

#### **Author's Note:**

God I hope we get some El + Holly scenes in Season Three. Hey, it's gonna have a lot of Erica, so maybe it could happen. Right?

I doubt the Duffers will go into detail regarding the

nosebleeds, but if they do, *goddamnit* I hope it ends up being nothing serious. They deserve happiness, damnit. Don't make more reasons for them to be upset. >:(

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As always, thank you so much for reading. If you liked, please drop a kudo. If you've got the time, a comment would make my whole day.

I love you all ♥